

Building Transnational Unionism: Australian maritime transport unions in the world

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Introduction

- Global context
- Unions – nation state
- GUF – National – Local
- Maritime Unions: Victoria – Australia - World

Considerations

- Local unions – decisions made elsewhere
- Solidaristic policies and campaigns
- Reaching out: union to union
- Alliances and mergers

The Study

- Focus: the relation between one global union, the Global Union Federation (GUF) that is the International Transport Federation (ITF) and a local union, the Maritime Union of Australia, Victorian Branch (MUAV).
- Five years research

From Local to Global and Back Again

General

- Maritime Union: 1993
- Small and active
- International history

Local

- Melbourne Port
- Stevedores
- Union

A Local ITF Working Group: 2004

- **That this meeting congratulates the MUA, RTBU (Rail Division) and TWU initiative of forming the ITF Victorian Transport Union Working Group.**
- **The Integration of Logistics Transport through the establishment of multi modal transport companies is happening and the VTUWG is a logical step for our three unions to take. Noting that this is not an amalgamation in any way shape or form, but a way for our unions to cooperate for the benefit of our members.**
- **We fully support the principal of this working group “... to establish a cooperative working relationship for the benefit of maritime, rail, and road and air transport union members.” Further, it seeks to uphold the charter of the ITF and identify and support the ideals, principles and campaigns of the ITF.**

The Logic: 1

- **The integration of logistics, transport through the establishment of a multi model transport companies is happening and the [Working Group] is a logical step now for three unions to take. Noting that this is not an amalgamation in any way, shape or form but a way for our unions to co-operate for the benefit of our memberships. We fully support the principle of the working group to establish a co-operative working relationship for the benefit of Maritime Union, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union and the Transport Workers Union members and further it seeks to uphold the chart of the ITF and identify and support the ideals, principles and campaigns of the ITF. Members of the MUA fully support this initiative. (MUA Leader, June 2007)**

The Logic 2

- **[Q] Do local delegates get involved very much in the ITF type of activities?**
- **[Interviewee] Yeah. Well, that's probably where these meetings that we have, you know, in the precinct are more important, because it's the sort of sinking it down. It's no use just having us three meeting [the leaders of the unions] and not having it sinking down any further [to the activists and members in the port]. (RTBU Leader, June 2009)**

Moving outwards: national alliance

- **...what we did was we moved from a hierarchical, bureaucratic response to organising an industry, [one] that had been confined behind very clear parameters. (National MUA, 2008)**
- **... one of the interesting things about Howard [Prime Minister, coalition government 1996-2007] as he was prepared to totally deregulate the whole of the Australian labour movement but not remove any of the constitutional constraints from unions like ours. ... So, and against all those constraints that we were put in, it was left to me and the national council of the Maritime Union to say that we needed to really go out and establish our bonafides and build trust based on ... our understanding of what was needed and a willingness to engage with any other labour organisation in a co-operative and mutually inclusive way. (National MUA, 2008)**

The Global: the ITF

At a meeting with a number of the relevant staff at the ITF in 2007, the comment was made that:

- Yes most unions have no real strategies developed in terms of how they tackle the logistics industry the way that it is organised today.(ITF Staff, 2007).

In a global world for transport, the ITF is about supply chains, the movement of goods, as well as the transportation of people. In relation to the ITF the task became:

- So the ITF's position really is to try and make sure that there is a union structure that is capable of moving forward. And I ... to my mind it will mean that we will have to pick winners and losers in the end in terms of support, resource allocation. (ITF Staff, 2007)

National Coordinating Committees

[Interviewee 1]... the national co-ordinating committees have been there for a very long time, every country has a national co-ordinating committee, it is a way of bringing together our affiliates in a particular country.

[Q] Not for organising?

[Interviewee 1] Not necessarily, they come together on education issues, they come together on a whole variety of issues.

[Interviewee 2] They could be good instruments for organising...

That is the new challenge, as we need to see because everybody is losing. So one way of doing it is together ... It has not been the traditional role... Yes to get them to play a more strategic role ... (ITF Staff, 2007)

Moving Forward

It needs a basic change in the thinking of the unions you know, unions are still thinking in terms of ... their kingdoms ... So if I am railway as long as the rail track runs you know that is my [kingdom] and then there is the boat, ok there is a boat boundary. So national coordinating committees also ... need to think you know that those boundaries are blurring now...And so the train doesn't stop on the track it goes into the port and ... a loaded empty port goes into the railway you know and from there it goes to the warehouse and then there is a truck carrying it you know. So they have a very national role, they have a very organising role in this, although the perspective may be the supply chains or whatever but a lot of those things are very very national, very very basic you know. (ITF Staff, 2007)

View from the National Level

- In terms of the Federation, the organisation in Victoria that is different, that is a great initiative and it doesn't take into fact, into account the objectives of those State-based unions. So I suppose that is the ground level and we want them to start organising ... something called TUF which is a Transport Union Federation [ATUF], which takes into account those things at that level but also ties in [with] New Zealand and ... so we squared out the base.
(National MUA, 2008)

View from International Level

- The Victorian model that they are pronouncing as being progressive is in actual fact just picking up an ITF policy. ITF policy is that there be co-ordinating committees in each of the countries so that transport unions do get together and rationalise what is going on with the restructuring of transport and what they can do together. And its ... been a very very good tool where unions aren't at conflict with each other because they can take their local hat off as they go into the meeting and put an ITF hat on and make some real progress, chewing and spitting and ...about the politics that are going on. (ITF Staff, 2007)

Assessment

- **First, for trade unions to effectively challenge key aspects of these emergent relations, they must take steps to rebuild the way they organize and operate at local levels.**
- **Second, unions must begin to look to their capacities, developing links and relationships that cross borders and place unions in the position to face the international world in which they operate.**
- **Third, in the process of undertaking change, unions will also address their purpose, shaping and reformulating their aims and objectives.**